AMERICAN GOTHIC
"A Tree Grows In Trinity"

CAST

SHERIFF LUCAS BUCK
GAIL EMORY
DR. MATT CROWER
SELENA COOMBS
MERLYN TEMPLE
CALEB TEMPLE
BEN HEALY

DANIEL TRULANE
DEPUTY #1
HARLAN JEEPER
TEAPOT
THE STRANGER/MANUEL SANTO
REVEREND
LITTLE GIRL
CURTIS Z. WEBB
NURSE
ALBERT

SETS

INTERIORS:

HUNTING LODGE
MAIN ROOM
BACK ROOM
HOSPITAL
TREATMENT ROOM
MATT'S OFFICE
HALL

EXTERIORS:

COUNTRY ROAD
BURNED OUT FARMHOUSE
TOBACCO FIELD
WOODS
HOSPITAL
RIVER FRONT
WESTERN RIVER BANK
HUNTING LODGE
PAUPER'S CEMETERY
CURTIS Z. WEBB'S HOUSE
HIGHWAY
AMERICAN GOthic
"A Tree Grows In Trinity"

TEASER

FADE IN

1  INT. HUNTING LODGE - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Out of the darkness, a door flies open and a shaft of light hits us dead on. In silhouette, a curvaceous figure enters FRAME, closes the door, and FLICKS on a lighter. We discover SELENA COOMBS, replete in tailored suit, and carrying a leather bag. Throughout the following, she addresses CAMERA likes she's talking to a favorite pet.

SELENA
Hello, lover. How you feelin'? Lightening a wall candle, she drops her coat to the floor and slithers toward us.

SELENA
Brought you a present.

She pulls a chocolate cupcake from her bag.

SELENA
Ms. Carter and her twins whipped these up for my English class... Mighty tasty.

Selena holds up the cupcake like an offering.

SELENA
(with concern)
Come on, darlin'. You got to eat something. I'm gettin' worried about 'cha.

We hear an O.S. MOAN. Selena sighs.

SELENA
Alright. We'll save this for dessert.

Putting the cupcake aside, Selena kneels to the ground, and pulls a thermos and sponge from her bag.

SELENA
Just got to make the best of things, don't we... amor?

CONTINUED
1 CONTINUED

She pours a bit of steaming water from the thermos onto the sponge, unbuttons her blouse, and squeezyes some of the water between her breasts. As she sponges herself...

SELENA
Yes... Just gotta make the best of things.

Another MOAN. Selena smiles...

SELENA
Time for your wet down.

And Selena lifts the sponge toward CAMERA. As she pushes it into the LENS, the screen goes BLACK and we HEAR....

SELENA (O.S.)
Oww!...
(then: likes it)
Nasty boy.

2 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY - TIGHT ON CALEB

As the boy runs into FRAME with terror in his eyes. CAMERA slowly circles Caleb as he attempts to catch his breath. We WIDEN to discover that he is surrounded by corn fields and has stumbled on a crossroads. A sign ahead reads "TRINITY: SIX MILES." Caleb considers this, looks over his shoulder, then resumes running down the road leading away from town. We PAN UP TO REVEAL an ominous looking scarecrow hovering above us, and...

LUCAS (V.O.)
We got a ten-year-old kid with a thirty minute start. I want him back by sundown.

3 EXT. BURNED OUT FARMHOUSE - DAY

SHERIFF LUCAS BUCK is surrounded by troopers. His deputy, BEN HEALY, lingers nervously among them while MATT CROWER looks on intently. In the b.g. we see firetrucks, yellow tape, etc.

LUCAS
Man who comes through for me wins a steak dinner.
MATT
What is this?! High Noon?
(to the troops)
The boy isn’t a criminal. He’s running because he’s lost his family and he’s scared...

LUCAS
(pissed)
He’s runnin’, Doctor, because you couldn’t keep him in your hospital...

MATT
(right back at him)
And I couldn’t keep you out. You want to do something for this boy? Leave him the hell alone.

GAIL (O.S.)
We’re wasting time.

Lucas turns toward the voice. We pick up GAIL EMORY, staring darkly into the smoking embers of the farmhouse.

LUCAS
I don’t believe we’ve met.

GAIL
I’m Gail Emory...
(pointedly)
And I know we have.

LUCAS
Well... where you been all these years, Missy? Lose your car keys?

BEN
She’s Caleb’s cousin.

LUCAS
Was I talkin’ to you?

GAIL
I’m going with you to find Caleb.

Gail pulls a laminated press I.D. from her purse and holds it before him.

LUCAS
Oh... Got the family nose for news, do ya?
GAIL
If that's what it takes to get your attention.

LUCAS
You already have my attention, Ma'am.
(smiles)
It's Sheriff Lucas Buck... That's Buck with a B.

Lucas turns to the troopers.

LUCAS
Gentleman, we have an esteemed member of the press joining our party this afternoon. Please make her welcome, and feel free to sing my praises.
(re: Matt)
Sadly, the good doctor...

Suddenly, Matt's BEEPER goes off.

LUCAS
...will be needed elsewhere.

Matt checks the number on the beeper, then glances up at Lucas, who is already moving toward a van. Matt and Gail follow him...

MATT
(re: beeper)
Something's up at the hospital. I have to get back.

GAIL
Go ahead. I'll be fine.

MATT
(calling to Lucas)
Caleb will need immediate medical attention as soon as he's found. You understand me?

Suddenly, Lucas swings open the cargo doors of the van
REVEALING

THE EYES OF A HALF A DOZEN DOGS

glaring at us ominously from behind a screen. A low GROWL resonates from within.

CONTINUED
LUCAS
Howdy, boys. Meet Dr. Crower.

BANG! The lead dog jumps ferociously at the screen. Matt takes a wary step back.

LUCAS
Funny... He don't seem to like you.
(yells)
Let's move out!

Lucas opens the screen, the dogs leap into the air, and we

FADE OUT

END OF TEASER
FADE IN

ACT ONE

4 EXT. TOBACCO FIELD – DAY – ON THE FEET OF THE HOUNDS

As they thunder through the tobacco field. PAN UP TO REVEAL LUCAS AND GAIL, hot on their heels.

LUCAS
Where'd you hear about this mess?

GAIL
I saw you on the news.

LUCAS
Really? How'd I look?

GAIL
(no compliment)
Haven't changed a bit.

LUCAS
Well, it's a terrible tragedy. Caleb's daddy just went on a rampage. Killed his daughter with a shovel, then offed hisself in my jail. Been a helluva day.

GAIL
Does Caleb know his father's dead?

LUCAS
Don't see how he could. He's been runnin' all night. You have to understand, Ma'am, when something like this happens to a child...

GAIL
I lost my parents when I was eight years old. I do understand.

LUCAS
Oh, shoot... 'Course you did. Then you know how traumatic something like this can be. I believe Caleb burned his house down as a cry for help; to protest the loss of his sister.

GAIL
That's one theory.

LUCAS
Got a better one?

CONTINUED
GAIL

Maybe he just wanted to get away from you.

INT. BEN'S PATROL CAR - DAY - MOVING

Ben's at the wheel. Matt's shotgun.

MATT

How long have you been with the Sheriff?

BEN

'Bout fifteen years.

MATT

Pay you well?

Ben glances at him. Knows where this is leading.

BEN

I get by.

MATT

Must be tough working for a man like that.

Ben doesn't respond.

MATT

Or maybe not.

BEN

Look... Whatever you think of Lucas, he's helped a lot of folks in this town.

MATT

How?

BEN

By giving them a second chance. After high school, I went down to Georgia to run tailback, right? Broke my collarbone Junior year. That same week, my girlfriend got pregnant. Suddenly, I had no scholarship, no money, and a baby on the way.

MATT

So he gave you a job.
5 CONTINUED

LUCAS
Not only that, he paid for my damn wedding. "Every man deserves a second chance," he said.
(darkening)
Course, now I'm divorced, hardly ever see my kids... but I'll never forget what Lucas done.

Matt considers the irony of this.

MATT
You're a loyal man.

BEN
Gotta be.

MATT
No matter what it costs you?

BEN
Doctor... I know who I work for.
(a confession of sorts)
But sometimes it's easier to try and change what you know... than face what you don't.
(looks at him)
You understand?

And as Matt considers the implications of this remark, we go

6 EXT. WOODS - DAY

Caleb is running along a creek. Hearing the hounds BAYING in the distance, he searches for a place to hide.

He sees a large tree that's been felled by lightning. Digging out some mud, he creates a crawl space in the trunk and starts to pull himself inside.

7 EXT. WOODS - DAY

Lucas, Gail and the posse have reached the crossroads.

LUCAS
What are your intentions once we find the boy?

GAIL
In what sense?

CONTINUED
LUCAS
Well, you’re the only family he’s got now. You lookin’ for custody?

GAIL
I just want to see that he’s taken care of... You can’t always depend on the child welfare system.

LUCAS
You seem to come out all right.

GAIL
(a jab)
Relative to whom?

LUCAS
You know, if I weren’t so damn romantic, I might think you didn’t like me.

GAIL
If you weren’t so damn smug, you’d know it.

Suddenly, a DEPUTY runs up to them.

DEPUTY #1
Sheriff? We got somethin’.

Lucas glances ahead and sees

THE FALLEN TREE

that Caleb crawled into, now surrounded by dogs. The lead hound is viciously ravaging something inside the trunk. LUCAS AND GAIL race ahead. Lucas pulls the deputy’s gun from his holster and FIRES into the air. The lead dog immediately ceases his attack. Lucas bends down to the hole, points his flashlight inside, and his face darkens...

LUCAS
Oh, Hell...

He reaches in and pulls out a dead opossum.

LUCAS
(with disgust)
Mountain rat.

Lucas tosses it to the dogs with a THUD, as Gail lets out a sigh of relief and we go back to
EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY - BEN'S PATROL CAR - MOVING

Ben and Matt, right where we left them. They’re closing in on the hospital.

BEN
Hey, Doc... You, uh... You gonna be examinin' Mr. Temple's body any time soon?

MATT
Not officially. That's up to the coroner.

BEN
Oh, right. Yeah.

MATT
Why?

BEN
Oh, nothin'... Just, uh... Well... I don't know if you heard 'bout how the man died...

MATT
I found the body.

BEN
Oh, right... Then I guess you know about the, uh... The, uh...

Ben makes a lame gesture to his throat.

MATT
The pen in his windpipe?

BEN
Yeah. Right. The pen.

MATT
What about it?

BEN
(testing the water)
Well, this was... suicide, right?

MATT
Looked that way.

BEN
(relieved)
Right. Uh... Did anyone happen to mention... who the pen belonged to?

CONTINUED
No.

BEN

Well...
(looks around, whispers)
It was mine.
(off Matt's reaction)
Now, you gotta believe me when I
say I had nothin' to do with Gage's
death. I swear, I'd never do
nothin' like that. But...
(completely sincere)
I loved that pen.

MATT

I see.

BEN

And I'd really like it back. My
mama gave it to me and it was kind
of a lucky charm.

MATT
(thinks he's kidding)
A lucky pen... from your mama.
The Temple c...

Ben smiles sheepishly.

MATT

Well... I'm meeting the coroner
this afternoon. After he's
completed his autopsy, I'll... see
what I can do.

BEN

Thanks, Doc. I'd really appreciate
that.

Matt gets out of the car, shakes his head, and starts moving
toward the hospital. Ben calls after him through the
window.

BEN

You take care of yourself now. And
don't worry 'bout Caleb. We'll
find him. Everything's going to be
fine, you'll see.

But Matt's already gone. Ben lets out a great sigh.

BEN

Everything's going to be fine.

And as the deputy wipes a bead of perspiration from his
brow, we go
9 EXT. RIVER FRONT - DAY

Caleb reaches the edge of a river, banked by a number of giant trees. He can hear the HOUNDS BAYING IN THE DISTANCE. Exhausted, he falls to the edge of the water, and cups his hands to drink. As he lifts his head, he sees

THE IMAGE OF MERLYN

standing next to him in the reflection.

GO WIDE

As Caleb jumps to his feet with a start. Merlyn is now beside him in all of her astral glory, seemingly transfixed by her image in the water.

CALEB

(awestruck)
Merlyn...

MERLYN

Is this what I look like?

CALEB

You look the same.

MERLYN

I don’t feel the same. Everything is different...

CALEB

For me too, Merly. The Sheriff is after me. He thinks he’s my daddy.

Merlyn turns to the boy.

MERLYN

What do you think?

CALEB

I think he’s crazy. This whole thing is crazy.

MERLYN

He was with our mother, Caleb... And he wants to raise you in his image.

CALEB

Well, that ain’t gonna happen.

MERLYN

You can’t run forever.

CONTINUED
CALEB
Why not? I don’t need him. I
don’t need nobody.

Caleb defiantly rips a branch off an adjacent tree, pulls
off his sweat shirt, and ties it around the tiny limb.
After tugging on it a couple of times, he tosses it into the
current and it begins floating downstream.

CALEB
You remember that old huntin’ lodge
we found?

MERLYN
Yes.

CALEB
That’s where I’m goin’. You want
to come with me?

MERLYN
I’ll always be with you.

CALEB
Alright, then...

We go

TIGHT ON CALEB

As he braces to jump...

CALEB
We gotta go upstream. Hope you’re
swimmin’s better then it used to
be.

...and off he goes, diving into the air, and we PULL BACK TO
REVEAL that Merlyn has vanished.

FADE OUT

END OF ACT ONE
ACT TWO

FADE IN

INT. HOSPITAL - TREATMENT ROOM - DAY - ON A BARE SHOULDER

In a curtained-off cubicle, Matt applies a cold compress to a woman's shoulder. As he lifts it, we see what appear to be human teeth marks in the flesh.

MATT (O.S.)
This isn't exactly an emergency.

We pull back to REVEAL SELENA, who smiles coquettishly.

SELENA
I'm sorry... Guess I got a little hysterical.

MATT
How did this happen?

MATT
Well, you know kids. Sometimes they like to rough-house.

MATT
A child did this?

SELENA
I'm a school teacher, Dr... (off his badge) Crower? And I was wrestlin' with one of my boys on the playground and he got a little frisky.

MATT
Must have been a pretty big boy. You're going to need a tetanus shot.

SELENA
Will it be painful?

MATT
Not really.

SELENA
(mildly disappointed)
Oh.

Matt moves to a counter, picks up a syringe. Selena calls after him.
Hip?

Matt glances at her.

That'd be fine.

Selena eases her skirt down just below the panty line.

Which one would you prefer?

Matt turns. Selena is smiling at him lasciviously. Off the doctor's reaction, we go.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

As Lucas and Gail lead the search party.

You sure this is the right way?

What'sa matter? Don't trust my doxies?

I might...

(glancing back)

But they seem to be following you.

We pull back to reveal that the lead hound has indeed fallen into step behind Lucas, the others taking up slack with the troopers. Lucas shrugs.

Well, between you and me...

(confidentially)

They're more for show.

We're moving away from town.

Caleb wouldn't go back there. Town means hospital.

Dr. Crower thinks the only reason he ran off was because you scared him.
CONTINUED

LUCAS
That doctor should take a pill. If Caleb'd been with me last night, none a this woulda happened.

GAIL
What do you want with him, anyway?

LUCAS
Just doin' my job, Ma'am. Gotta protect my people.

GAIL
Like you did my parents?

GRRRRRR. Gail turns to discover the lead hound baring his teeth at her menacingly.

LUCAS
I believe your tone has offended someone.

GAIL
You found their bodies. How come you never contacted me?

LUCAS
Might ask you the same question, Ma'am.

GAIL
I was a little girl...

LUCAS
Not so little now. If you really wanted the grisly details, you knew where to find me.

(beat)
Did you really want to know?

Gail glares at Lucas, takes a deep breath, and walks off. Lucas sighs, looks down at the hound.

LUCAS
Give her time... She just hasn't faced her demons yet.

EXT. WESTERN RIVER BANK - DAY

A drenched Caleb pulls himself to the shore. Shaking himself off, he climbs a steep embankment toward an old wooden fence. Once there, he rips aside a rotting picket, pulls himself through, and disappears into the foliage.
13 INT. HOSPITAL - MATT'S OFFICE - DAY

Matt is glancing at his watch, trying to remain patient. Selena lounges in front of him, eating ice cream from a cup.

SELENA
Will I have any side effects? I've got a luncheon with the ladies auxiliary tomorrow and I need to look my best. Presentation is everything, don’t you agree?

Selena sucks on her little wooden spoon. Matt rises.

MATT
Miss Coombs...

SELENA
Selena.

MATT
I really need to get going.

SELENA
Oh, I'm sorry.
(rising)
Here I am going on about me, when you’ve got all these wounded souls to heal...

She nonchalantly picks up a photo on Matt's desk.

SELENA
This your family?

MATT
(with hesitation)
Yes.

SELENA
Beautiful ladies.

He moves toward her, gently taking the photo from her hand.

MATT
Yes... They were.

SELENA
(hopeful)
Past tense?
(then; realizing)
Oh, Doctor... I am so sorry. I...
I didn’t realize...

CONTINUED
Matt

It's okay.

(smiles)

Now, if you don't mind...

Daniel pops his head in the door.

Daniel

Am I interrupting something?

Matt

No.

(then; to Selena)

Feel better.

Selena nods sadly, squeezing past Daniel at the door. Dan gives Matt a look, which he ignores.

Matt

Is the coroner here yet?

Daniel

Just left.

Matt

I thought he was doing autopsies on the Temple girl and her father.

Daniel

So did I... But he just hauled their bodies outta here.

Matt

(shit)

Oh, no...

Matt moves to the phone.

Daniel

He, uh... left somethin' for ya.

Daniel pulls a plastic bag from his lab coat. Inside, in all it's glory, is the lucky, monogrammed, platinum... pen. Matt shakes his head.

Matt

Sorry, Dan. I'd have been there, but that woman just wouldn't leave...

14 INT. HOSPITAL - HALL - DAY - ON SELENA

Selena is listening raptly. After slathering her lips with gloss, she slips down the hall, massaging her hip.
EXT. WOODS - DUSK

Caleb is weaving through old growth woodland. As the last rays of sunlight seep through the trees, he stumbles upon

CALEB'S POINT OF VIEW - A PAUPER'S CEMETERY

Right out of Dickens. Overgrown with moss and weeds, a number of dilapidated wooden tombstones dot the landscape. Hearing VOICES, Caleb ducks behind an ancient arbor.

CALEB'S POINT OF VIEW - AN OLD PICKUP

is parked alongside two freshly dug graves. A seer-suckered man of fifty, HARLAN JEETER, and his tomboy daughter, TEAPOT, nineteen, are in the middle of unloading a new, wooden burial marker from the truck.

HARLAN
Watch it, girl... Waaaatch it.

TEAPOT
They really buryin' these two side-by-side?

HARLAN
First thing in the mornin'.

TEAPOT
That's foul.

HARLAN
Just 'cause he killed her, don't mean they can't share the same worms.

CALEB
reacts. He watches as

HARLAN AND TEAPOT

carry the wooden marker toward an identical one already mounted at one of the open graves. The marker faces away from us; we can't read the legend. As they mount it in wet cement, Teapot runs her hand along the front.

TEAPOT
No offense, Daddy... But this ain't your best work.

HARLAN
Well, I only had two hours. Sheriff put in a rush.

CONTINUED
15 CONTINUED

TEAPOT
(reading)
Rest... in... Pease.
(laughs)
Rest in peas? You got him restin' in peas, Daddy!!

HARLAN
I’ll rest you. Come on Teapot, we’ll fix that tomorrow...
(teasingly)
Gotta shovel at home with your name on it.

Daddy wraps his arm around daughter, and they move toward the pickup. As they get in...

TEAPOT
(teasing him)
If you ever kill me, hope you use somethin’ cleaner than a shovel.

HARLAN
(laughs)
How ‘bout a pen?

As they both break up, the truck drives off and

CALEB
emerges from the arbor, warily approaching the tombstones. Moving to face them, his eyes widen as we reveal these legends painted beneath two, crudely painted trees.

GAGE TEMPLE (1946 - 1995)
MERLYN ANN TEMPLE (1978 - 1995)
REST IN PEASE REST IN PEACE

CALEB
(in disbelief)
Daddy...

Caleb’s lip starts to tremble, he looks back toward the pickup... and begins running after it.

CALEB
Hey! (screaming)
HEY!

THE PICKUP
is already out of sight, but that doesn’t stop
CALEB

who picks up a rock and throws it at the truck with all his might, as he keeps running, deeper and deeper into the dark woods, running from his pain... until he can run no more. He stumbles to a halt, the tears streaming down his face.

EXT. RIVER FRONT - DUSK

Lucas and Gail are standing where Caleb had been on the bank. The Sheriff is staring at the water intently.

DEPUTY #1 (O.S.)

Sheriff?

Lucas turns and Deputy #1 runs up, holding the sweat shirt/branch decoy that Caleb had thrown into the water.

DEPUTY #1

Dogs found this about a quarter mile down river.

LUCAS

(proudly)

Smart boy.

Reverend Lucas gingerly unties the wet sweat shirt and hands it back to the Deputy. Moving to an adjacent tree, he places the limb against the fresh gash: Perfect fit. Then Lucas does something odd... he closes his eyes.

GAIL

What are you doing?

LUCAS

Prayin'.

There is a moment of silence, then...

LUCAS

Time to go home, Miss Emory.

GAIL

What do you mean? Caleb’s still out there.

LUCAS

It’s gettin’ dark. We’ll find him tomorrow.

GAIL

I’m not giving up now.
CONTINUED

LUCAS
You want to spend all night out here alone?

Gail stares at him. Really doesn't like this guy. He raises the tiny branch before her eyes.

LUCAS
We've already found him, Ma'am... He just don't know it yet.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Caleb is on his last legs when he comes upon

EXT. OLD HUNTING LODGE - NIGHT

Rotting and abandoned, strangled by creeping vines and black oaks, it is Hansel and Gretel's worst nightmare.

Caleb cautiously approaches the Gothic front door. It's locked. He creeps around to a crumbling stone chimney. Alongside is a small, iron panel: The wood bin. Caleb wrenches it open... and slips inside.

INT. HUNTING LODGE - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

A dark, oppressive room flanked by two doors leading to the main hall. Caleb moves to a window and wipes years of dust from the glass. He peers into the forest to see if he has been followed, then lets out a great sigh: Safe at last. As he settles onto a large, deerskin rug in the corner... we HEAR A SOUND.

Caleb reacts. He glances around nervously... We HEAR it again. It seems to be coming from behind one of the doors. Caleb rises, moves to the first one... and cautiously pries it open.

INT. HUNTING LODGE - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Pitch black. Caleb pulls out his matchbook... and strikes.

CALEB'S POINT OF VIEW - THE MAIN ROOM

A great hall crowned by an octagonal cathedral ceiling. A number of animal skins line the walls.

Caleb cautiously moves forward when suddenly... MOAAAAANN. The boy spins on his feet, coming face-to-face with

CONTINUED
A DARK STRANGER

bound by ropes to the main support beam of the lodge. He is shirtless.

CALEB'S EYES

widen in horror as

THE STRANGER

suddenly lets out a piercing SCREAM and

CALEB

bolts to the entry hall, slams the door, and we slowly PAN DOWN TO

A TINY CUPCAKE

smashed to bits on the floor.

- END OF ACT TWO -
ACT THREE

FADE IN

21 EXT. HUNTING LODGE - MORNING - ESTABLISHING
A new dawn. The SOUNDS of the forest just coming alive.

22 INT. HUNTING LODGE - BACK ROOM - MORNING
As the first rays of sunlight stream through a stained glass window, we discover

MERLYN
facing the glass, trying to feel the light on her face.
CAMERA continues moving to discover

CALEB
huddled on the deerskin rug, clutching a two by four, fast asleep.

MERLYN (O.S.)
Why are you still running?

The boy stirs. Opens his eyes...

CALEB
(seeing her)
Hey...

Merlyn turns toward him.

MERLYN
Why are you still running, Caleb?

CALEB
Daddy's dead, Merly. I saw his grave. Yours too...
(with great sadness)
Everybody's dead.

MERLYN
Not everybody.

Merlyn nods toward the door leading to the main hall.

CALEB
I ain't goin' back in there.

MERLYN
That man needs your help.

CONTINUED
He's a monster. CALEB

No... He's just hurt. MERLYN

Caleb turns away from her.

He doesn't have much time. MERLYN

What am I supposed to do? CALEB

Help him. Set him free. MERLYN

Why should I? CALEB

Because you can. MERLYN

Caleb looks at her. Senses her longing. CALEB

I miss you, Merly... I miss you too. MERLYN

Merlyn's image slowly vanishes. The boy sighs. CALEB

Wish I could do that.

INT. HUNTING LODGE - MAIN ROOM - MORNING

The door CREAKS open and light shoots into this dark chamber. With great reluctance, Caleb enters. Hearing a BUZZING sound, he looks down and sees

THE TRAMPLED CUPCAKE

covered with flies.

Caleb studies it for a beat, then continues moving into the room, finally reaching

THE STRANGER

pale and drawn, his head hanging toward the floor.
(warily)
Hey....

The man doesn't move. Caleb takes a step closer.

You awake?

Caleb

The man slowly lifts his head... squints. He is barely conscious.

You get in trouble or somethin'?

Caleb

The man just stares at him blankly.

I'm talkin' to you, man.

Caleb

The man lowers his head again.

Look, I want to help ya, but if you don't answer me...

Man

(a wail)
Ahhhhhhhhhh....

Caleb jumps back with a start.

Don't do that.

Caleb

The boy holds for a beat... then moves closer still.

I'm gonna free ya. But if I do, we gonna be friends, right? No more wailin'.

Nothing.

Okay. We gonna be friends.

Caleb glances around the dark room, sees

Some old bottles

piled in a corner. Caleb moves to the bottles, picks one up... And SMASHES it against the wall. The man jerks his head up in fear.
It's alright. Just need somethin' for them ropes.

The man stares at him warily. Caleb moves to the man and begins cutting at his bonds with the sharp edge of the bottle.

Sorry I ran out on ya last night, but I didn't know what you was about.

Caleb takes a few final slashes at the rope, and it snaps. The Man's arms fall to his sides and Caleb eases him to the floor, propping him up against the beam...

You're freezin'. Can you walk?

The man shakes his head weakly.

Come on, let's try...

Caleb attempts to lift him; the man lets out a MOAN.

Shoot...
(sighs)
We gotta find you a doctor.

Caleb starts to rise, but the man stops him. With his free hand, he slowly traces these cryptic letters into the dust on the floor: SOL.

Sol?

The man reaches into his pocket, pulls out a money clipped wad of bills, and holds them out to the boy.

You don't have to pay me nothin'.

The man urges him to take it.

Well... I guess we could use some food.

Caleb takes the bills and slips them into his pocket.

CONTINUED
CALEB
Alright, Sol. I'll get us some
food and find you the doctor...
(rising; to himself)
If the sheriff don't find me first.

EXT. PAUPER'S CEMETERY - MORNING - TIGHT ON BRANCH

as two hands plant it in the black earth. We PULL BACK TO
REVEAL LUCAS at Gage and Merlyn's graveside. He is
surrounded by a few locals, Ben, Selena... and Gail. As a
REVEREND looks on warily, Lucas rises from the ground,
resuming his "eulogy".

LUCAS
No one knows why these things
happen...
(glancing at Gail)
And maybe it's not our job to ask.

ON GAIL
staring at him intently.

LUCAS
But like the Reverend said...
(pointedly; to Ben)
We can take comfort knowin' that
Gage and Merlyn are in a better
place.

ON BEN AND SELENA
as the deputy shakes his head. Selena places a comforting
hand on his shoulder. Ben looks at her warily.

LUCAS
I plant this tree in their memory,
hopeful that it might someday
capture the spirit of the family.
(dramatic beat)
Thank you all for coming.

REVEREND
Thank you, Sheriff.

Lucas turns to the Reverend, surreptitiously slips a C note
in his pocket. Just as quickly, the Reverend removes it.
REVEREND
Normally, I’m happy to receive donations...
(coolly handing it back)
But in this case, I’ll make an exception.

LUCAS
(ice)
You are truly a selfless man.

Selena approaches them.

SELENA
That was beautiful, Lucas.

LUCAS
Thank you, Miss Coombs...
(spider to the fly)
Have you met the Reverend?

Selena smiles coquetishly... The Reverend doesn’t.
Meanwhile...

GAIL AND BEN
are talking it up.

GAIL
How well did you know Mr. Temple?

BEN
Not well. Old Gage pretty much kept to himself.

Lucas drops an arm around Ben’s shoulder.

LUCAS
Neighbors said he was a quiet man,
never gave anyone any trouble...
(smiles; to Gail)
Gettin’ all the facts, Ma’am?

GAIL
What’s happening with Caleb?

LUCAS
Crew’s been out since dawn. Now
that we know where he’s travelin’,
should have your little cousin home
in no time.
CALEB

watching all from the edge of the forest. Having overheard Lucas' remark, he studies Gail intently. Cousin? He lingers a moment, then slips back into the forest. Back to

LUCAS, BEN AND GAIL

LUCAS
Can we offer you a ride back to town, Miss Emory?

GAIL
No, thank you.

LUCAS
Just want to make sure you're taken care of. Tourists are our lifeblood, aren't they Ben?

GAIL
Is that why they keep disappearing?

(to Ben)

LUCAS
Fire up the car.

Ben clears his throat, and dutifully stumbles off.

GAIL
According to my editor, this county is the Bermuda Triangle of tourism.

LUCAS
We rank lowest in serious crime in the entire state, Ma'am.

GAIL
And highest in missing persons. Last spring, a reporter from the Miami Herald came up here to investigate!... He hasn't been heard from since.

LUCAS
Well, this is a recreational area. Between the woods and the beaches, accidents happen. Maybe he was a poor swimmer.

GAIL
Or a poor judge of character.

(beat)

Good day, Sheriff.
24 CONTINUED 3

Gail turns and walks off. As Lucas looks after her, Selena sidles up to him.

SELENA
Sorry I didn’t get to meet your little friend.

LUCAS
(darkly)
You will.

Off Lucas’ gaze, we PUSH PAST him toward the tiny tree planted at the graveside.

TIGHT ON THE TREE

As something strange begins to happen.... Something miraculous. A tiny branch sprouts right before our eyes. Off this little slice of God’s Green Acre, we go to

25 EXT. CURTIS Z. WEBB’S HOUSE - DAY - ON MATT

As he opens the sidewalk gate and moves up the front steps, reaching the screen door, he hits the bell. He notes an old ice box on the front porch. Suddenly

A GOAT

leaps through the door, almost knocking the doctor off his feet. As he catches his breath

A LITTLE GIRL

of about six appears in the doorway, holding another goat by the scruff of the neck. She lets this one outside, then looks up at Matt.

LITTLE GIRL

Yes, sir?

Matt takes her in. She is truly lovely -- what his daughter might have been.

MATT

Is your father home?

LITTLE GIRL

(calling offstage)

Daddy? (then; to Matt)

We’re eatin’ cake.

CONTINUED
MATT
(smiles)
What kind of cake?

CURTIS Z. WEBB
pops his head over his daughter's shoulder. He is a big,
beefy man of forty-five.

Goat cheese.
CURTIS Z.
Matt looks up at the man.

MATT
Mr. Webb?

CURTIS Z.
Yessir.

MATT
I'm Matt Crower. I missed you
yesterday.

CURTIS Z.
Oh, right... The new doctor.

MATT
Can we talk for a minute?

CURTIS Z.
Go on to your Mama, Taylor.

The Little Girl stares at Matt for a beat, then disappears
into the house. Curtis steps outside, moves to the ice box.

CURTIS Z.
She's a sweet girl. Little slow.
(beat)
How can I help you, Doc?

MATT
I was curious about the result of
your autopsies on Gage and Merlyn
Temple.

CURTIS Z.
(calming)
Eli? Get over here.

The larger of the two goats approaches Curtis.

CURTIS Z.
This here's Eli. He's our big boy.
MATT
Why you were so eager to get their bodies out of the hospital?

Curtis reaches into the fridge and pulls out a handful of feed. The goat begins eating from his hand.

CURTIS Z.
You know the amazing thing about goats? They'll eat anything. Most self-sufficient creatures in the world. You feed 'em shoes—get back milk.

MATT
Mr. Webb....

CURTIS Z.
That nanny over there's expectin'. Should have kids by Christmas.

MATT
The Temples were buried this morning. How did you have time to complete your work?

CURTIS Z.
(sighs) The girl took a shovel to the head, am I right?

MATT
According to the sheriff.

CURTIS Z.
And the father was found with a pen in his throat, self-inflicted.

MATT
That's your finding?

CURTIS Z.
There was blood all over his hands.

MATT
What about the angle of entry? Or the depth of the wound?

Curtis pats the goat's head thoughtfully.
CURTIS Z.
You know why I love these animals?
(pointedly)
They accept things as they are.

Matt stares at him a long beat.

MATT
You didn’t do any autopsies, did you?

Curtis dusts off his hands.

CURTIS Z.
I take pride in my work, Doctor.
But sometimes... other forces prevail. Girl died of head trauma, father was a suicide. I accept that...
(clear warning)
And I suggest you do the same.

MATT
Lucas Buck was the last person to see these people alive. 

Curtis turns, moving for his door. Matt is right behind him.

MATT
He was also the last person to see Caleb’s mother before she died. Three members of the same family gone...

The coroner opens the screen door, about to step inside...
Matt spins him around forcefully.

MATT
Why are you protecting him?!!

CURTIS Z.
Because...
(tough)
I have a family too.

And with that, Curtis slips into his house. Off Matt’s look of contempt, we go to
26 INT. GAIL'S CAR - DAY - MOVING

Gail has an open Powerbook at her side. Keeping one hand on the wheel, she types with the other, intermittently taking her eyes off the road. Suddenly...

CALEB

appears in her windshield, blocking an entrance to a bridge.

GAIL

slams on the brakes in astonishment as THE CAR SCREECHES to a halt, just inches from the boy.

GAIL

Caleb...

She leaps out of the car... He stops her with his tone.

CALEB

You really my cousin?

GAIL

Yes.

SELENA

CALEB

How come I never heard of ya?

GAIL

I... I left town a long time ago. Before you were born.

CALEB

You workin' with the Sheriff?

GAIL

No... I'm here to help you.

CALEB

I don't need no help...

(beat)

I need a ride.

FADE OUT

END OF ACT THREE
FADE IN

ACT FOUR

27 EXT. PAUPER'S CEMETERY - DAY - ON A SIX FOOT TREE

The same one Lucas had planted earlier. A man's coat is hanging from a lower branch. After taking in its size, we PAN to discover

HARLAN AND TEAPOT

back at work. Paintbrush in hand, he is just putting the final touches on his memorial to "Rest in Peace". Lucas' tree is now OFF CAMERA.

    TEAPOT
    Daddy... Why do ya put trees on these things?

    HARLAN
    Supposed to represent Death... and Rebirth. (smiles)
    Also easy to paint.

Harlan rises, examines his work.

    HARLAN
    What'd ya think?

ON GAGE'S MARKER

"Pease" has been replaced by "Peace". Back to

TEAPOT

who shrugs.

    TEAPOT
    I liked him better in peas.

    HARLAN
    (slaps her butt)
    Get me my coat, girl.

Teapot moves OFF CAMERA. After a beat...

    TEAPOT (O.S.)
    Hey, Daddy...

We hear a RUMBLING SOUND. Harlan is cleaning his brush...

    TEAPOT (O.S.)
    What was you sayin' 'bout... rebirth?

CONTINUED
27 CONTINUED

Harlan turns, suddenly seeing

LUCAS’ TREE

now a towering giant, looming ominously above the graves.
Harlan’s coat dangles precariously on a limb high above
Teapot’s head, as the branches continue their slow RUMBLE...

HARLAN

stares at the tree, thunderstruck.

HARLAN

My God...

TEAPOT

(awed)
This wasn’t no bigger then a shrub
an hour ago.

Harlan hurriedly moves to his daughter.

HARLAN

(fearfully)
Come on, Teapot.

TEAPOT

(this is bitchin’)
I can get it.

Teapot jumps up and catches the lowest branch...

HARLAN

(terrified)
No... Come on!

And as Harlan pulls his daughter OUT OF FRAME, we slowly
PUSH IN on his jacket, now enveloped by the branches.

CALEB (V.O.)

(insistently)
You can’t keep me here!

28 INT. MATT’S OFFICE - DAY

Caleb and Gail are standing before Matt, who is gripping the
boy tightly by the arm.

CALEB

We gotta help Sol.

MATT

Who’s Sol?
The man he found in the woods.

CALEB
If we don’t get there, he’s gonna die.

Matt picks up the phone.

MATT
Rita? I’m going to need an ambulance...

CALEB
They’ll never find him. I gotta take ya.

MATT
Caleb, I can’t let you leave again. If anything happens...

CALEB
But the man’s expectin’ me. Look...

Caleb pulls the money clip from his pocket.

CALEB
He even gave me money for food.

Matt takes the money clip from the boy. As he does, a plastic card falls from between the bills to the floor. As Gail picks it up...

CALEB
You gotta trust me. I won’t run off, I promise.

GAIL
Matt... look at this.

Matt glances over her shoulder and sees

MATT’S POINT OF VIEW – A PRESS BADGE.

There is a photograph of a dark, clean shaven man in his early thirties. Beside it is his name, Manuel Santo. Place of work... The Miami Herald.

GAIL (O.S.)
He’s the guy.

BACK WIDE
What guy?

MATT

GAIL
Manuel Santo is the man my editor told me about. He's been missing for months.

MATT
(to Caleb)
I thought you said his name was Sol?

CALEB
Well, who cares what his name is... We gonna help him or not?!!

INT. HOSPITAL - HALL - DAY

Lucas and Ben are plowing down the hall.

LUCAS
This son-of-a-bitch is really beginnin' to irk me.

BEN
(trying to calm him)
Well, don't doctors usually talk to a coroner after there's been a...

Lucas glares at him.

BEN
Suicide?

LUCAS
Yeah, but my coroners don't usually talk back.

A heavy set NURSE approaches them.

NURSE
Hey, Sheriff... (smiles flirtatiously) Got your chocolates.

LUCAS
Glad to hear it, Louise. You have a killer birthday, now.

The Nurse giggles, moves off.

CONTINUED
BEN
Maybe Curtis thought he was doin' you a favor.

LUCAS
Are you defendin' him?

BEN
No, I'm just...

LUCAS
Don't drop the loyalty ball, Ben. They reach an elderly gent, ALBERT, who's seated in a wheelchair.

LUCAS
Feelin' better, Albert?

ALBERT
Should be back at work in a couple weeks. Appreciate you smoothin' things out with my boss, Lucas.

LUCAS
That's what I'm here for.

Albert smiles, Lucas slaps him on the shoulder, and he and Ben continue moving ahead.

LUCAS
This coroner made a big mistake, Ben. And if you don't know that, you don't know much.

BEN
I'm not bein' disloyal Lucas, I'm just tryin' to clarify, that's all.

LUCAS
Good. Because if this doctor gives me any more trouble... You're gonna shoot him.

As Ben reacts, Lucas reaches for the door to Matt's office.

30 INT. MATT'S OFFICE - DAY
The door flies open, REVEALING
LUCAS' POINT OF VIEW - AN EMPTY ROOM
Caleb, Matt, and Gail are long gone.
LUCAS AND BEN

enter purposefully, the sheriff scanning the room, seeing
THE PRESS BADGE
lying next to the wad of bills on Matt's desk.

LUCAS

picks it up, studies it for a moment...

   LUCAS
   Hell...

Then suddenly bolts from the room. Ben starts to follow,
but hesitates, glancing back at

THE WAD OF BILLS

just sitting there, waiting to be plucked.

BEN

looks over his shoulder cautiously, then slowly creeps
toward the desk top, reaches down, and picks up... the
pen. Right behind the money, still in the plastic bag...
and lucky as ever. Like a schoolboy on Christmas morning,
Ben eagerly opens the bag, slipping the ballpoint into his
pocket. With great relief, he looks skyward...

   BEN
   (reverently)
   Thank you.

EXT. CURTIS Z. WEBB'S HOUSE - DAY

Our friendly neighborhood coroner enters his front gate, and
luggs up the steps toward his door. The nanny goat is doing
circles on the lawn. Curtis glances around for Eli.
Reaching the front porch, he calls his name...

   CURTIS Z.
   Eli? Come on. Lunch time for everybody.

The nanny approaches... but no Eli in sight.

   CURTIS Z.
   (to the nanny)
   Where's your boyfriend?

CONTINUED
31 CONTINUED

As he pets the nanny’s head, Curtis opens the fridge, reaches inside... and feels something odd. Turning, his face goes white.

ELI’S HEAD

is staring back at him from the icebox. As

CURTIS

stumbles back in horror, we gratefully leave him for

32 EXT. HIGHWAY – DAY – ON LUCAS’ PATROL CAR – MOVING

Racing down the interstate like a shark.

33 INT. LUCAS’ PATROL CAR

Lucas is at the wheel, Selena shotgun. She is clearly upset.

    LUCAS
    You told me this was handled.

    SELENA
    I’m sorry, Lucas, but I just couldn’t hurt him.

    LUCAS
    (outraged)
    So you kept him as a pet?

    SELENA
    I liked him, alright?
    (off his look)
    And if you want to know the truth, he kinda liked me.

    LUCAS
    (dark)
    This is a real problem, Selena.

    SELENA
    Look, if the doctor finds him before we do, maybe it’s not such a bad thing. Manuel hasn’t been eating lately and I’ve been kinda worried...

    LUCAS
    "Manuel" is a reporter. He’s gonna "report" things.
SELENA
(sighs)
He won't say a word.

LUCAS
Oh, really?
(sarcastically)
What'd ya do? Bite off his tongue in a fit of passion?

Selena averts her eyes. As Lucas stares at her in disbelief, we go to

34 INT. HUNTING LODGE - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Caleb enters, Matt and Gail right on his heels.

CALEB
(with urgency)
He's in here.

The boy moves to Santo, who's barely conscious.

CALEB
Hey, Sol... I got the doc for ya. Snacks too...
(emptying his pockets)
Chocolate bar, Peanut butter cup, taffy...

GAIL
(seeing him)
Oh, my God...

MATT
Caleb... Would you grab some blankets from the car?

CALEB

As Caleb moves to the back room, Matt leans over the man, checks the pulse in his neck. His breaths are fast and shallow.

MATT
Mr. Santo... Can you hear me?

The man nods weakly. Matt puts his hand on Santo's chest for a beat... does a couple more tests... then rises.

CONTINUED
MATT
He's hypothermic... He won't make it to the hospital.

Realizing the implications, Gail moves past Matt, kneeling at the man's side.

GAIL
Is there anything we can do for you?

The man weakly points to the letters he'd drawn for Caleb in the dust: SOL.

GAIL
I'm sorry, I... I don't know what this means.

Slowly and deliberately, the man draws a circle around the letters.

GAIL
(dawning on her)
Sol...
(beat)
Matt... It's Spanish.

Gail slowly raises her eyes toward the ceiling, seeing a boarded up window.

Matt is perfectly in sync.

MATT
Sun.

CALEB
reenters, hauling a couple of blankets.

CALEB
Where do you want em?

Matt pulls a chair from the wall...

MATT
Come here, Caleb...
(to Gail; re: the chair)
Will you hold this for me?

Gail steadies the chair as Matt gets on top of it.
MATT
(to Caleb; pointing at the ceiling)
If I lift you up there, think you can pry off one of those boards?

CALEB
Sure, but...

Caleb puts down the blankets and Matt lifts him skyward. As Caleb begins prying the board loose...

CALEB
Why we doin' this?

MATT
It's what your friend wants.

CALEB
Well, if this what Sol wants...
This what Sol's gonna get.

RIIIIPPPP! Caleb pulls the plank from the window and
A GREAT SHAFT OF SUNLIGHT
suddenly shoots through the ceiling and floods Santo.
Matt eases Caleb to the floor, steps off the chair, and our three heroes move to the man's side.

SANTO
opens his eyes, drinking in the sun's warmth. He raises his head slightly...

CALEB
Y'all were right. Sol's warmin' right up.
(to the man)
This is just whatcha needed, huh Sol?

The man reaches for Caleb's hand... and squeezes it tightly.

CALEB
Yeah... Just whatcha' needed.

Matt notices that the light has illuminated more then Sol... There is a knapsack now visible behind him.

MATT
Gail...
She moves toward it, opens it up... pulls out papers, film, computer discs...

GAIL
Is this what you wanted us to see, Mr. Santo?

The man nods weakly, shares a moment with Caleb, then closes his eyes... and dies.

CALEB reacts. Looks at Matt...

CALEB
Hey... What'sa matter with him?

Matt reaches for Santo's neck, feels for a pulse...

MATT
He's gone, Caleb.

CALEB
But he can't be. I... I gotcha here in time...

... is sur
GAIL
You did the best you could.

CALEB
But, this wasn't supposed to happen...
(rising; with mounting anger)
It wasn't supposed to happen...

GAIL
Caleb...

The boy runs from the room. Suddenly, the main door bursts open and

LUCAS AND SELENA enter. There is a tense moment as the four size each other up, then seeing the dead man, Lucas strides forward, dragging a shocked Selena in tow.

LUCAS
Well... look who's found our fugitive.
(to Selena, re: Santo)
This the man?
Selena nods sadly.

MATT
What the hell's going on here?

LUCAS
Been huntin' this fella for months. Ever since he attacked and robbed Miss Coombs...

Selena looks away, guilt stricken. Gail holds up the knapsack.

GAIL
This man was a journalist. Someone was keeping him here.

LUCAS
That someone was his partner, Ma'am...

(off Santo)
A partner who obviously took his share of the money and double crossed him.

MATT
I do. (incredulous)
What partner? You have this person in custody?

LUCAS
Well, we did... 'til we buried him this morning.

(off Gail's reaction)
'Fraid Gage Temple was more dangerous then anyone realized.
(taking the knapsack)
I'll need this as evidence.

And as Gail and Matt react, Selena sadly draws the blanket over the dead man's face and we go to

EXT. PAUPER'S CEMETERY - DAY

The sky is quite dark now, and the wind is on full HOWL as Caleb comes tearing across the landscape...

CALEB
Merlyn!
(screaming)
Merlyn!!!
I'm here Caleb.

Caleb turns to discover the image of his sister, standing between the boy and Lucas' monstrous tree.

You lied to me!

No...

You said I could help that man.

You did help him. You gave him what he needed.

He didn't need to die.

I don't want to see you no more, ya understand? You're dead. Dead as he is.

I live in you, Caleb...

And so does your father.

Just get outta here, will ya? Leave me alone!

BOOM! A lighting bolt EXPLODES into Lucas' tree, and in SLOW MOTION, the giant begins to fall.

Merly... Look out!

As Caleb starts to run, the massive tree comes CRASHING down, right through Merlyn's image, eclipsing her... and trapping the boy in it's cage-like branches. As Caleb struggles to free himself...

CALEB

(screaming)
Merlyn! Merrrrlllyyn!

LUCAS (O.S.)

It's alright, son.

Caleb reels back in fear as
A HAND

suddenly drops into FRAME, reaching out to him. The boy looks up to discover

LUCAS
towering above.

LUCAS

Time to go home.

As Caleb stares at Lucas with trepidation, A GREAT FLASH OF LIGHTING EXPLODES IN THE SKY and we

THE END